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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated an induction year mentorship program in conjunction with the extended Generic Special Education Teacher Training Program at Texas A&M University. A questionnaire was developed and administered in the spring of 1989 to two groups of individuals for an extended year generic special education program, eight student teachers and eight novice teachers. The responses obtained from the student teachers served as a pretest to be compared to their responses after participating in the Fall mentorship training session. Eight Special Education teacher education graduates in their first year of teaching were matched with master teachers who served as their mentors and participated in a mentorship orientation workshop along with principals and other staff. In addition, student teachers and novice teachers were compared concerning their perceptions of the importance of specific mentor characteristics, which indicated that novice teachers exhibited a stronger and more uniform perspective of which characteristics would be most important in a mentor. Novice teachers indicated that the three most important characteristics of a mentor were supportiveness, trustworthiness, and self-confidence. Brainstormed ideas at the mentorship orientation workshop on areas in which the mentor might most helpfully support the induction year teacher produced three categories of responses: interpersonal needs, building and district policies, and instructional skills and professional growth. Study participants reported the importance of establishing a regular meeting time early in the year, limiting the length of their meetings, and meeting in a setting other than the school if possible. Discussion of findings from other mentoring relationship studies is also included. (Contains 22 references.) (JDD)

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DEVELOPING INDUCTION YEAR MENTORSHIPS IN A GENERIC SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

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Students in fields such as law, medicine, theology, architecture and the like can expect to begin their professional careers serving in an apprenticeship or internship for an introductory period of time, applying their newly acquired knowledge and skills under the watchful tutelage of an experienced practitioner. Teachers, on the other hand, have most often been expected to exhibit expert performance upon graduation from teacher education programs, solo fashion in their first days and weeks in the classroom. Teachers, teacher trainers, educational theoreticians and researchers alike agree that the first year experience is indeed a difficult and often personally and professionally threatening one for most teachers (Grant & Zeichner, 1981; Ryan, Newman, Mager, Applegate, Lasley, Flora & Johnston, 1980). This is particularly true for teachers in special education who are often greeted by ill-equipped classrooms, a scarcity of essential supplies with which to meet the special needs of their students who are likely to differ widely in ability, more students than they can reasonably serve in the limited time frame, and an overwhelming amount of paperwork (Weiskopf, 1980). Thus, not only is entry of the teacher practitioner into the educational profession fraught with professional hazards, but also with conditions that severely test the morale of young teachers and make retention in this field a continuing and expensive problem.

Many human service fields have found mentorship during the novice years particularly effective in providing sensitive guidance to the evolving professional, serving as a secure base for the professional level learning characteristic of entry level performance. When carefully and purposefully implemented, mentorship appears to be especially beneficial for improving job productivity and satisfaction, enhancing the novice's professional development and ensuring job retention, as well as for reducing stress and raising personal morale. Although teachers report having experienced informal mentorships from which they gained self-understanding, a sense of personal worth, clearer goals and skills for meeting them, and other personal benefits (Krupp, 1987), specific professional or instructional guidance tends to be lacking in these spontaneous relationships, often evolved solely because of the novice's search for a role model. Weber (1987) emphasizes the need of teachers for role models upon entering the profession and describes how well this coincides with the need of experienced teachers to nurture and help develop the novice teacher, thus finding added meaning in their own careers. Nevertheless, a somewhat irrational belief held by many beginning teachers that immediate professional autonomy and collegial status are reasonable expectations appears to interfere with meaningful help-seeking by almost 92% of beginning teachers, according to Glidewell, Tucker, Todt and Cox (1983).

Despite this ambiguity, it is generally agreed that beginning teachers do reasonably need specific help, especially with classroom management, maintaining discipline, and delivering effective lessons (Insley, 1987). It is becoming more and more obvious that some type of formal assistance must be provided to first year teachers if we are to avoid the loss to individuals and to society of the personal and financial investment in teacher education. In a study comparing the efficacy of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater's First Year Teacher Induction Experience (Parker, 1986), data indicated a higher attrition rate for those inductees who received no support versus those who were assigned a mentor. Those teachers with support indicated that mentors were highly valued, and that the mentors helped them resolve problems, especially those having to do with classroom management. In addition, as demonstrated in a pilot study of a year-long induction program in York County, Pennsylvania (Rupp, 1988),

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strong mentor-beginning teacher relationships were associated with improved teaching performance on the part of both the mentors and the beginning teachers. Teachers who worked with mentors in the California Mentor Teaching Program (King, 1988) also reported learning to feel more positive about themselves and about their teaching while learning new teaching techniques.

Assistance for the induction year teacher is not simply a matter of the school district announcing a Professional Pal Program, nor of telling the inductees which veteran teacher has been assigned as their mentor, even though beginning and experienced teachers report that the most useful and consistent source of psychological and technical support is the fellow teacher (Egan, 1986; Gehrke & Kay, 1984). Formalized mentoring programs require careful planning and support if they are to accomplish wise and effective guidance (Gray & Gray, 1985; Haensly, submitted for publication; Wagner, 1985). Such planning must include mentor orientation and training, as well as a system for assessing the progress and contribution of the mentoring intervention to teachers' professional development and personal career satisfaction. Formative evaluation must precede and accompany the intervention if appropriate modifications are to occur in response to the particular needs of the school district and its participants.

The purpose of the study reported here was to pilot and evaluate an induction year mentorship program in conjunction with the extended Generic Special Education (GSE) Teacher Training Program at Texas A&M University. The structure of the GSE Program, begun in 1984 in response to the increasing need for high quality generic special education teachers, was based on an intensive review of the literature to determine knowledge, skills and experiences necessary in preservice training of generic special education teachers. The students earn a Bachelor of Science degree at the end of the fourth year. During the fifth year of the program, they complete a semester of student teaching and also earn certification. By the end of the induction year or first year of teaching, they have earned a Master of Education degree in Educational Psychology. The first cohort of the Texas A&M University GSE program spent their induction year (sixth year) without a formalized mentor in the school district, although university directors of the program served as mentors. Although development of a formalized mentorship program was initiated with the second cohort, the pilot study also collected data on the mentor perspectives of the first cohort.

The objectives of this pilot study have been: a) to examine, prior to the establishment of a formal mentoring program and as part of the formative evaluation necessary for developing a sound mentorship program intervention, the understanding and attitudes of participants of the six year GSE teacher preparation program regarding characteristics of mentors and mentoring relationships as might be applied to their own professional growth and personal development; b) to develop a training program for mentors, novice teachers and supporting staff which would include information on the benefits and procedures of mentoring, instruction in communication skills and adult learning styles, and an overview of the projected mentorship program; and c) to gather preliminary data on the effects of mentor/protege training and implementation of this semi-formalized mentorship program.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Following a survey of the literature on mentorship and formalized mentoring programs in various professions, a questionnaire was developed and administered in the spring of 1989 to two groups of individuals from an extended year generic special education program, eight student teachers and eight novice teachers. These subjects were asked to rate observed and desirable mentor characteristics on a five-point Likert Scale and to respond to the question: What do you consider to be the three most important characteristics for a mentor to have? The responses obtained from the student teachers served as a pretest to be compared to their responses after participating in the Fall mentorship training session.

Early in the 1989 school year, the eight Special Education teacher education graduates, now in their first year of teaching, along with the master teachers selected to serve as their mentors, principals in the placement schools, and other advisory staff

were asked to participate in a 3-hour mentorship-orientation workshop. Using an adult-learner interactive mode of presentation, the workshop focused on the following: a) mentorship background information, as well as brainstorming ideas for the ways in which novice teachers might need help, and the ways in which mentors might help novice teachers; b) practice of skills in requesting and communicating feedback and encouragement through role playing situational simulations; and c) the mentorship developmental sequence described by Gray's (1985, 1987) Helping Relationship Model for successful mentoring relationships. Monitoring of individual mentorship progress is continuing throughout the induction year through a self-report questionnaire listing and rating the importance of content and topics addressed in the recommended weekly meetings between mentor and protege. An additional questionnaire will be completed by the mentors at the end of the year to assess the skills and attitudes that the mentors believe first year teachers in this field should possess and to summarize professional development individual mentors and novice teachers believe has occurred.

A case study of one selected mentor/novice teacher pair was conducted to monitor specifically the development of the helping relationship from dependency on the mentor for direction, to autonomy by the novice teacher (Gray's Helping Relationship Model, 1985). Monthly interviews by the researchers probed factors and conditions in the school setting promoting or impeding development of a successful mentorship relationship, and articulation of evidence of benefits to novice teachers, mentors, and other school personnel. Thematic analysis of the interview information and of the information reported through their weekly meeting report forms provided additional information regarding the development of mentorships between experienced and novice teachers.

RESULTS

Comparison between Student Teachers and Novice Teachers of Perceptions of Specific Mentor Characteristics. Data gathered at the Spring GSE Program meeting provided initial information on the perceptions of mentors, comparing the the views of those currently in the student teaching situation (Cohort 2) with those of the GSE teachers who were experiencing their novice year of full-responsibility teaching (Cohort 1). Means and standard deviations of the importance of each mentor characteristic as perceived by the student and novice teachers were obtained and the characteristics then rank-ordered. Though the difference was not statistically significant, student teacher responses showed greater dispersion than those of the novice teachers. When rank ordering the means, the third ranked characteristic (competent teacher) of the novice teachers showed a higher mean than the highest ranked characteristic (interest in being a mentor) of the student teachers (4.9 vs. 4.6), even though for both groups, competence in teaching was ranked third. Having the experience of a year of teaching apparently gave the novice teachers a stronger and more uniform perspective of which characteristics would be most important in a mentor.

Perceptions of Importance of Specific Mentor Characteristics. There were three characteristics for which perceptions of importance by the prospective novice teachers (Cohort 2) remained the same (that is, strong) between their student teaching experience and their induction year of teaching, that is, prior to having a collegial mentor and after a partial year with a mentor (see Figure 1). These characteristics were "having a similar philosophy of teaching", "that the mentor be a warm and caring person", and "that you could trust your mentor". The perceived importance of the mentor being a good listener and having time to spend with the novice teacher tended to increase for these participants, as well as to show less variability among respondents (Figure 2). The perceived importance of specific *ideal* mentor characteristics (Figure 3) appeared to strengthen from the student teaching period to the induction year. Sharing was ranked as most highly valued characteristic by induction year teachers, unanimously receiving the highest rating. Five other mentor characteristics not only strengthened in perceived importance, but also showed decreasing variability among

participants; these were "interest in being a mentor", "gives moral support", "resourcefulness of mentor", "time for listening", and "provider of emotional support".

When asked to generate the three most important characteristics a mentor should have, respondents during their student teaching experience identified "being a role model", "competent teacher", and "supportive of their protege". However, during the induction year, the respondents identified supportiveness, trustworthiness, and self-confidence.

The Mentorship-Orientation Workshop. While all of the induction year teachers (IYT) attended the workshop, only one assigned mentor and one administrator found time to attend. Strong positive evaluations by participants of the orientation workshop supported the projected usefulness of mentorship training at this time in the induction year experience. Brainstormed ideas on which areas the mentor might most helpfully support the induction year teacher (Table 1) produced three categories of responses. The categories were interpersonal needs, building and district policies, instructional skills and professional growth. Brainstormed ideas on how the induction year teachers would most likely need help fell into the categories of personal growth and development, classroom policies and procedures, specific special education issues, and building policies and procedures (Table 2).

Post-Orientation Follow-up. Using a form developed by the researchers, proteges and mentors reported the frequency and content of meetings held for the purpose of engaging in the mentorship relationship. Of the eight pairs, one pair reported frequent meetings (i.e., weekly) and at these meetings discussed an especially wide variety of topics. Those topics consistently discussed were delivery of instruction, student problem behaviors, and parent communication. Because of threat of parent-initiated litigation, an unfortunate situation into which this novice teacher was placed, this particular IYT and her university supervisors believe she would have experienced much greater difficulty completing the year without the mentor type of support. She appears to be maintaining the desire to be a special education teacher and continues to have a positive attitude about special education teaching, which she attributes to the support of her mentor. A second pair consistently discussed academic resources and delivery of instruction. At least once in the mentorship progress reports of most of the pairs, there is a reference to evaluations received on the Texas Teacher Appraisal System instrument.

On the whole, mentors tended more often than the novice teachers to be providers of information, suggestors of resources and support materials, and arrangers of networking. As the result of providing information, the mentor appears to have enabled the IYT to generate problem solutions to the problems that arise and are discussed in the mentorship sessions. As well, one mentor (who had attended the orientation) commented on how much she had grown professionally through the mentor experience.

The case study participants reported a similar direction and content focus in their mentorship meetings. Several additional findings have arisen in the monthly interviews with this particular mentor/IYT pair. They expressed the belief that establishing a regular meeting time early in the year was an important factor in their developing relationship; without this calendar item, they believe other tasks and suggested meetings would have interfered. Using the researchers' suggestion that limiting the length of their meetings might ensure commitment to meeting, they also found that a 30 minute time period worked well to establish a regular meeting pattern without creating a burden. They began to count on this time together, as well. The fact that they are both in the same building has also facilitated their meetings. Further, a chance decision one week to meet in a different setting, where they could relax without interruptions from other staff or lack of privacy by the presence of students, was so successful that they continue to pursue this option on a regular basis and have found these out-of-the-building meetings more personally satisfying. Though a professionally well-prepared IYT, she reports that her self-confidence has grown tremendously with her mentor's support; other teachers have remarked about the value they've begun to

observe in this collegial relationship. The mentor teacher reported that the enthusiasm of the IYT and her commitment to "doing her best and doing things right" has renewed her own professional enthusiasm which had grown lackadaisical and even apathetic at times. The movement of the protege from dependency to autonomy seems reflected most soundly in the fact that this IYT has begun to be sought for advice by other teachers and that she feels more confident in proposing new directions.

DISCUSSION

Mentoring relationships have often existed among teachers, even when not specifically labelled as such, although contact by novice teachers with experienced colleagues during these beginning years is most often limited to situations that do not lend themselves to acquisition of pedagogical skills, effective counsel, guidance and encouragement. In Egan's (1986) observations of 15 protege teachers and 6 mentors in naturally occurring relationships, he found that mentoring was viewed as an empowering relationship and respect for the autonomy of the protege was a mark of a successful mentor. In this empowering relationship "the proteges move from a dependent to an independent status in relation to their mentors" (Egan, 1986, p.61), that is, through the transmitting by the mentor of knowledge, advice, skills or support in an adult learning mode, the novice teacher becomes an effective educator (Egan, 1986). Gray (1985, 1987) advocates strongly for formalized programs and the Helping Relationship Model, in which mentors are trained to work for increasing independence on the part of their proteges, along with professional and personal growth. Analysis of the nature of the developing relationship between the induction year teachers and their mentors in this study, for the purpose of validating this phenomenon, has indicated existence of such effects even though the time frame for its development has been limited as yet.

In a study of instructional leadership development among mentors in one implementation school district of the California Mentor Teacher Program (King, 1988), researchers found that both mentors and protege teachers benefitted through the staff development training provided for the mentors. Not only did the protege teachers learn new teaching techniques from their mentors, becoming more positive about self and their teaching, but mentors too improved in their own class settings. McKenna (1988) found substantial benefits accruing to mentors in a study of 37 experienced teachers in the University of Wis-Whitewater's Teacher Induction Program, ranging from improvements in their own classrooms due to curriculum innovations, and other ideas and techniques gleaned from association with their protege in their mentoring experience. At least two of the eight pairs of this study report this to be the case. The case study IYT repeatedly reported growth in her self-confidence, and the case study mentor enthusiastically reported renewal and rejuvenation due to her relationship with the IYT as her mentor. McKenna proposed a Mentor Mirroring Model to explain this enhancement of self, experienced through the mentoring functions these teachers performed.

Regarding the nature of the mentor/protege relationship, characteristics of building rapport and trust in the mentor were indicated by pilot study participants (Figure 3) as critically important. McKenna (1988) found commitment to a long term relationship between mentor and protege appeared related to a) the mentor's skill in building rapport and trust and b) confidence by the protege in the mentor's teaching ability. The mentor roles of advisor, counselor and supporter reported as desirable by the pilot study participants are distinctly different from those assumed by a cooperating teacher, in which performance evaluation and specific feedback are major functions. The orientation workshop emphasized the inappropriateness of evaluation by mentors (cf., Gray 1985, 1987), a function which often threatens the trust building and sharing.

Logistical concerns for supporting formalized mentorship programs must also be given attention. Pilot study mentors and induction year teachers reported difficulty in finding the time to meet due to their assignment to school building committees and other duties. Assigned mentors found it difficult to attend the orientation workshop and, although the printed materials were brought back to the mentors by the IYTs, we

believe the absent mentors were not equally prepared for the mentorship task. Based on the use of Flanagan's critical incident technique to study mentorship in an induction program in Pennsylvania, Rupp (1988) found that a critical contribution to mentorship success was common release time for mentor and protege. Adequate conference time for mentors and beginning teachers is essential if the objectives of an induction program are to be attained (Huffman & Leak, 1986). In a multi-site evaluation of the California Mentor Teacher Program, Ruskus (1988) concluded that, in addition to adequate release time, mentorship success depends strongly on the need for validation of selected mentors, selection based on experience and ability to provide instructional support, and careful monitoring of the mentoring process. Further, orientation of prospective mentors and proteges to this special relationship, monitoring of its progress and subsequent adjustments, with ongoing and summative evaluation have been found to be especially critical components of developing a successful, formalized mentorship program (Gray & Gray, 1985, 1987; Haensly, submitted for publication).

Conduct the pilot study and especially the provision of report procedures appears to be giving these mentor/protege pairs support and a tool for self-evaluation; that is, the monitoring procedure and external interest in the development of mentorship seems to be giving these individuals at least some modicum of support. It is becoming quite apparent that much more significant support must be given, and that that support must be in the form of recognition by school supervisors of the value of the meetings to staff development and morale, along with provision of time for them to take place. Without regularly scheduled and allotted time, it is difficult for both mentor and IYT to take time for the meetings, much less for them to complete a 1-page monitoring report and self-evaluation of the process. It is also apparent that the orientation has been beneficial as the pairs who have most consistently met and reported on their meetings were the ones in which the mentors also attended.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Mentorship provides an ideal environment for teachers to pursue ideas, creatively, with the wise guidance and counsel of a master teacher. Some state legislatures have begun to require the provision of mentors to give support and advice to beginning and probationary teachers (Taylor, 1987). However, to achieve full benefit of this option, planners must understand the nature of the mentoring process and its particular parameters in the school setting (Haensly, in press), its subtle nuances and requirements and possible outcomes (Gehrke & Kay, 1984). Formalized mentorship programs must be appropriately implemented with well developed orientation or mentorship training and adequate support for the ongoing process in order to "1) improve the effectiveness of induction-year teachers, 2) assure quality instruction for students, and 3) increase the retention of those with professional promise" (TEA, 1989). In addition, school districts must provide the necessary support for this valuable addition to staff development, maintenance and retention. Mentor teachers must be recognized and rewarded for their contribution to the staff development activity if they are to be expected to continue to invest their time and energies into this aspect of teaching. This study provides valuable information about some of the conditions necessary for implementation of effective formal mentorship programs.

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